



# The Mong Porsche Spyder

By Tom Miller



Top: At the Mount Washington Hill Climb. Ed Hyman photo.

Above: The Mong Special on its custom trailer circa 1960

They say every car has a story, and the "Mong Special" car has a lot to tell. I first heard about this car in the early '90s when a friend named John Risch owned and raced it every few years at VSCCA events, including the first Pittsburg Grand Prix in 1983, and the American Specials Reunion at Lime Rock in 1991, where I saw it run. Cunningham was the guest speaker!. His father, John Sr., a prominent East Coast car collector, purchased the car from Dolf Battifarano in 1973 so his son could go racing when John Jr. returned from Vietnam. All that was known at the time was that it was the first of more than 100 racers built by a well known sports car builder, Jerry Mong of Medina, Ohio. Jerry owned both Bobsy Racing and Vanguard Industries. He built about 200 cars including the Vanguard Formula Vees.

The car has a steel tube chassis and mid-engine layout with an aluminum sports racer body, but part of the allure for me was that it was rumored to have been raced with a 4-cam motor. The car came with a Porsche 1600 S pushrod motor mated to a 356 gearbox. All of the known history at the time was in a letter that came with the car.

Written by Jerry Mong in response to pictures that Dolf sent to him in 1971, he mentions it was the first car he built.

### A Speedster funds the race car

I was always intrigued by the Spyder and wanted to buy it from John, but it was way out of my price range. By 1990 I had already owned a few rough Speedsters, all needing structural work. Fortunately I found a very solid 1957 Speedster worth restoring. Over the next five years I restored it to original, as a street car.

When it was done, I joined the VSCCA, got my vintage race license, and did a few track events and hill climbs. After almost wrecking the Speedster at Lime Rock one day, I realized that racing a nicely restored street car with bumpers, etc. on the track was not the proper way to go vintage racing. In 2005 I sold the Speedster to a dentist in Holland, and now I had most of the funds to finally try to purchase this alloy-bodied Spyder from John. After much negotiating, we ultimately struck a deal.



Front suspension showing the finned brake drums and magnesium backing plates, items usually reserved for Factory racers and special customers.

**Right:** A clipping from the August, 1964 *Car And Driver* magazine classified section listing the Mong Special for sale by Floyd Sable of Minneapolis.

**Below:** The Special seen from the rear. The bodywork has been left in its race-scarred condition.

VERY Rare Lagonda 1939 V12 Rapide. Close Coupled Sports Saloon. Extremely High performance, top speed still well over 100 mph. Offers to and details from: Lane, "Ceres," The Riveland, Swindon, Nr. Cheltenham, Glos., England.

#### MERCEDES-BENZ



MERCEDES 300 SC—Last One Produced—1958  
Very Rare Collector's Item in Top Running Condition—Complete Details Available on Firm Offer around \$5000—G. De Chabannes, R. R. #1, Piedmont, P. Q., Canada.

#### MG

1953 MG-TD \$1500. Jim Gleeson, 8 Harriet, Springfield, Illinois.

#### MORRIS SPECIAL

MORRIS SPECIAL tube frame, Fiberglass body, Stewart-Warner instruments, Half completed, \$400.00 O.N.O. Gerald Rhoads, R. R. #5, Godfrey, Illinois 62035.

#### F.M. SPECIAL



F.M. SPECIAL—Built by Gerald Mong, builder of national winning Bobsey's, Porsche and VW components, aluminum body, tube frame, R5 tires, fresh 1500 carrera engine, trailer. Immaculate condition \$2600. Floyd Sable, 3210 Groveland School Road, Wayzata, Minn.



## Restoration and investigation

I took the car to Hoffman Vintage Racing in Pennsylvania to have Kurt Hoffman help me get it ready for the track. This is where the detective work started. We found the car had finned alloy Porsche brakes with magnesium backing plates and brake shoes, which are only found on factory Werks RS-60 or Formula one cars. Through my research, I believe these were put on the car sometime between 1965 and a 1968. I'm still trying to find out who put them on, and from which car they came.

I worked on the car slowly and along the way spent a lot of time on the internet researching the car. Jerry Mong's son Ron is still involved in the family business of building and maintaining race cars in Ohio. He put me in contact with Jerry and he has sent me a few pictures of himself with the car and a newspaper article describing him winning "First in Class" at Cumberland raceway and "averaging 100 miles per hour." At the Cumberland archives, records show him in class F - car number 213 with Donna Mae Mims and Bob Tullius on the

track that day. He also raced the car in SCCA at Waterford Hill Michigan, Nelson Ledges, the Steel Cities Races, Mansfield Hill Climb and Mid Ohio.

In 1993 *Vintage Motorsport Journal* did a feature about him and mentioned the car. In the 2004 book, *Vintage American Road Racing Cars*, Jerry was quoted as saying he built the car because of "...the inability to buy a Porsche," and "I realized you could switch the ring and pinion and run the thing like a 550 Spyder". I've kept Jerry up to date on the news of his old car.

## More history surfaces

The first big break was finding Dolf Battifarano via the internet. Dolf still lives in northern New Jersey. He bought the car around 1969 From Richie Muckolow, who owned Van's Auto Body in that state. I went up to see Dolf, and his wife produced a photo album with great photos of Dolf, working on the car and racing it in the hill climb competitions at Hobo Hill in New York circa 1971. Dolf's pictures showed that present at the races that day were: a Porsche powered Devin "D", his shop class project, driven by the teacher; a 550 Spyder driven by his girlfriend's dad, Dick Hyland, and another gentleman with a Speedster. Not a bad weekend while still in High School! Dolf went on to a racing career in Formula Fords on a national level with Fred Oper.

The next big break was an email I received November 30, 2007 in response to a small article about my car in *Hemmings Sports and Classics*. A man named Floyd Sable contacted me via email and told me he bought the car from Jerry during the winter of 1961/62 and also bought the custom trailer Jerry built for the car, which is still with it today! Floyd did an SCCA driving school (Land 'O Lakes Region) with it in the summer of 1962 (Harold Zimdars and Augie Pabst were teaching and running the school). He installed the roll bar brace so it would pass SCCA tech. Floyd said he took out the pushrod engine and put in the Porsche Carrera 1500 engine. He raced it for a few years after the school at race tracks in the Minneapolis area. He sold the car in the fall of 1964 to a gentleman in Chicago. He also had a picture advert from the back of a 1964 *Car and Driver* magazine, listing it for \$2600 (See previous page). Floyd said he used the money to buy

*Continued on page 28*



**Top:** Jerry Mong in the Special at Cumberland.

**Above:** Floyd Sable of Minneapolis strikes a heroic pose with the car in the early 1960s.

a \$5000 house! Floyd gave me some great photos of him with the car. Now the real clincher: He also said he had about 5 minutes of super 8mm film on the car racing at the Milwaukee Mile! As you could guess, Floyd got an e-mail from me every six months asking if he had found the film, each time the answer, "I'm looking". Finally, a couple months ago a package showed up with a CD of the film on it. I have uploaded it to YouTube and you can see it there (search for Mong Porsche Spyder). Floyd is still involved in racing to this day.

My progress on the car was slow but steady. In 2007 I had it ready enough to do the Mt. Washington Hill Climb in New Hampshire with the VSCCA. The previous owner John Risch came along as my pit man. I made all four runs, and actually put 60 miles on the car that weekend. I found the car barely drivable due to the condition of motor mounts,

and a worn out transmission. I had to drive it left-handed, holding the car in 3rd gear with my right. Not too fun on mountain roads with frost heaves and no guard rails!

It was back to the shop for more work which included a new transmission with a Speedster gear set with a 7:34 ring and pinion. This work was done by Eric Wills of Wills Werks in Virginia. The exhaust was rebuilt and rerouted for better flow. I took the finned Werks brakes off, and put on all new brake hydraulics and plain 356 A brakes for now. The clutch is hydraulically operated, and was rebuilt. Jerry had built the front end with a VW bus steering box, so new tie rods we easily sourced. The original seats were re-done, but modified to allow me to fit, as I'm 6'2". Basically the car has been completely rebuilt mechanically, but, so far I have left the old worn paint job from 1969 that was put on by Dolf. You can still see his

name painted on driver's door.

I have since driven the car on the street, (it is legally registered and insured in NJ) and now carries the license plate from my '57 Speedster: "SPEED". In August 2009 I ran the car at the Mount Equinox Hill Climb in Vermont, with Kurt Hoffman in the pit. I made all the runs in the rain. Back to the shop for some suspension work and a revision the roll bar. My plans for next year include running a road course, entering autocross events with the PCA, and doing a few shows.

As for ongoing research, I think a Dr. Riccardelli of Ohio may have owned it for a short time in 1964. I'm looking for history on the car from 1964 to 1969. This is the period of time when the finned Werks brakes went on, and the 4 cam came out. Any info would be greatly appreciated. **Tom Miller** 

(Tom@millersportscars.com).



At Hobo Hill, New York about 1971. At the hill climb that day was an early 550 (right), a Devin (gray car) and a Speedster. The Mong Special was wearing reversed wheels and really wide tires, with modified wheel wells to accomodate the rubber. **Below:** The four-cam engine was installed in about 1961 by Floyd Sable. The rear section of the car was hinged for engine access. The front was also hinged under the nose (unlike a Porsche Spyder). Jerry Mong smiles from the cockpit of the newly-built car.

